



“Celebrate Messiah: Plan Diligently”

First Sunday of Advent
5:30 pm Saturday, November 26, 2016
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

While getting ready for the sermon for tonight, I realized that, for years, I have been misreading this particular gospel lesson. I had been reading this passage from the point of view that I wanted to be one of the ones who were *taken*, not one of the ones who were *left*. And I know that comes in large part from my experience way back in youth group.

When I was in high school, the youth group I was a part of watched a movie called “A Thief in the Night.” It was about the rapture, that is to say, the second coming of Christ, and what the world would look like, in the days leading up to and immediately after that event.

Now, let me say, that as Christians in the Lutheran tradition, we don’t really go along with the theology and world view that adherents of rapture thinking do. We believe in the Second Coming, but **not** necessarily in what folks who take “rapture” seriously would have us believe.

That particular ideal of faith (the rapture) takes a couple of verses and builds an entire “end times” theology (that’s called “eschatology” - which means “the end times”). This Rapture viewpoint says that right before Jesus returns, all believers will be “raptured,” that is, taken up, directly into heaven to be with God the Trinity. Those whose faith wasn’t *strong* enough, or *true* enough, or simply *didn’t* believe, or believed in the “*wrong*” god, or whatever, would remain on this world and have to endure some type of literal hell on earth until they came to belief, or they died, or Jesus returned.

Let me stress again, this is **NOT** a Lutheran point of view.

Those who follow that thought, in my opinion, tend to ignore all the times that Jesus repeatedly says, like he does in our reading tonight,
No One, not even Me, know when I will return.

Looking back on that movie today, it was a 1970's version of that 2000 Kirk Cameron movie “Left Behind,” if you’ve happened to see that movie, or any of the sequels. It was one of those movies designed to *frighten* you into believing. Or maybe better put, that the movie was trying to scare the *Hell* out of you.

So, to get back to our lesson: for **years**, I had looked at this passage as one of those dealing with rapture theology. And then, when preparing this sermon, I had one of those epiphanies. You know, along the lines of looking at a drawing of a candlestick, when something in your brain goes “click”, and all of a sudden, instead of the candlestick you’re looking at a drawing of two faces in profile, looking at each other. I’m reading this passage, and realize, this isn’t about the folks who get *taken*; this passage is actually saying, we want to be the ones who are **still here**. We want to be here because the ones who are taken are gone; they aren’t here to do any more for the sake of the gospel. We *want* to be the ones who are **still here**.

Leading up to our section tonight, Jesus **does** spend considerable time striving to prepare his followers for what is to come, how to spot the signs. But, as I now read this passage, I see Jesus wants those followers, not to be the ones *taken*, but to be like the homeowner preparing for the burglar, that we should be here in order to help spread his message: the message of grace; that message of love, that message of preparedness, the message of Christ’s return.

Yet isn’t it interesting: Jesus warns us, wants us to prepare, and then turns around and tells us,

Uh, yeah. You won’t know when this is going to happen. You remember that story about Noah? How life was going along as “Situation Normal”? until the flood gates opened up? Yeah, it’s gonna be like that.

So we’re left to say

Great, thanks a lot, Jesus. That is soooo not helpful.

As I sat and pondered, though, this is what I came to understand: Yes, keep living our everyday life. Because our everyday life is *supposed* to be one filled with grace, and love, and forgiveness. Our everyday life is *supposed* to be one where we look out for those less fortunate than us; where we feed those who have no food; where we clothe those who need the proper clothing for the weather they have to endure.

Our everyday life also calls us to *be ready*. Not in a “Doomsday Prepper” kind of way. Rather, to be ready in a “Christ could return today” kind of way, “so, how should I live my life of belief, my life of service?”

We have, tonight, a great example of planning ahead, with the baptism of the Roy Boys, Bryant & Hudson. Nicole & Peter just a little bit ago promised, on behalf of Bryant & Hudson in front of all of us, and before the Lord God, that they would raise these squirmy boys in a house of faith. And looking at the older kids - Camden, Caroline, Casey & Hope - and knowing Peter the little bit that I do, I **know** that they will do the best that they can in order to fulfill those promises. Peter & Nicole are planning ahead with their own faith; they are planning diligently for the faith of their sons (and the rest of the Roy clan).

So, how do we get ready? One way is to talk to God, regularly and frequently. We tend to call that “prayer,” but too often we Lutheran Christians think of prayer as something

formal, something that only “professionals” can do. That is *Not* the case. Prayer is simply *talking* with God, saying what’s on our hearts and minds, asking for guidance, giving thanks for the good that we have, and asking for help with the stuff that’s happening in our lives that isn’t so good.

We get ready for Christ’s return by reading scripture. Regularly and frequently. Even if it’s simply little bits and pieces, a verse or two at a time. Start with something easy, like the Gospel of Mark, or the Book of Acts, before you try something a bit weightier like The Gospel of John, or the Letter to the Romans.

We prepare when we gather with other believers, again, regularly and frequently. We gather so we can talk about faith. We gather so we can sing songs of praise. We gather so we can simply realize that, look at this, there are other people who believe in the things that I believe in, and it doesn’t matter if they look like me or have the same kind of job or income, because what brings us together is our *faith*.

If we live as though *Faith* and *Spiritual Growth* will just “happen,” they probably **won’t**. Jesus is reminding us that we need to be **active** in our faith life. We need to *plan diligently*. Or we *won’t* be the ones still here, to serve and love our Lord.

Amen.

Copyright © 2016, John H. Brock. All rights reserved.



www.trinitycamphill.org